

# Melanoma

## Understanding Melanoma

Melanoma is a type of skin cancer that often starts with unusual or changing moles. Suspicious moles often have characteristics represented by the acronym "ABCDE": they are Asymmetric in shape, have irregular Borders, show multiple Colors, are larger than a pencil eraser in Diameter, and may Evolve or change over time. When your doctor suspects melanoma, they perform a biopsy, usually a wide excisional biopsy. This helps determine how deep the abnormal cells go and ensures they remove a safe margin of healthy cells around the mole. At the time of biopsy, your physician will also send this to a lab for genetic testing to look for mutations such as BRAF, NRAS, and KIT.

## Staging Melanoma

Melanoma can be classified into different stages. It might be "in-situ," meaning it's only in the top layer of skin (the epidermis). It can also be locally advanced, with stage II involving deeper skin layers and stage III affecting local lymph nodes or involving nearby 'satellite' lesions. Stage IV implies metastatic disease, or that the cancer has traveled far from the primary site. If the melanoma goes deeper than 1mm, your doctor may biopsy a nearby lymph node (sentinel lymph node) to check if the disease has spread further.

## Treating Melanoma

The primary treatment for melanoma is surgery. Additional treatments like radiation or systemic therapy (treating the whole body) are considered for cases where the cancer has spread from its original location.

Increasingly, systemic treatment for melanoma involves targeted therapies based on genetic mutations (such as targeting BRAF) or immunotherapy to boost your body's immune system against the cancer. Clinical trials might be an option after surgical removal to test new treatments or combinations.



Remember to discuss your specific diagnosis and treatment options with your doctor.